UNDERSTANDING ISLAM



Abdullah Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center

About the Author

Abdullah Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center, is a non-profit organisation that aims to promote an understanding of Islam across different sectors of society, both nationally and globally.

The oldest and most famous ever such structure is the Alexandria lighthouse which was first built between 297BC and 280BC. From the rich Qatari heritage of sailing at large, the lighthouse was a tangible way of returning to land safely. Abdullah Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center now uses this exact metaphor to lead needy minds to ever lasting peace and comfort and towards a complete way of life.

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Islamic Cultural Center

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In the name of Allah, most Gracious, most Merciful

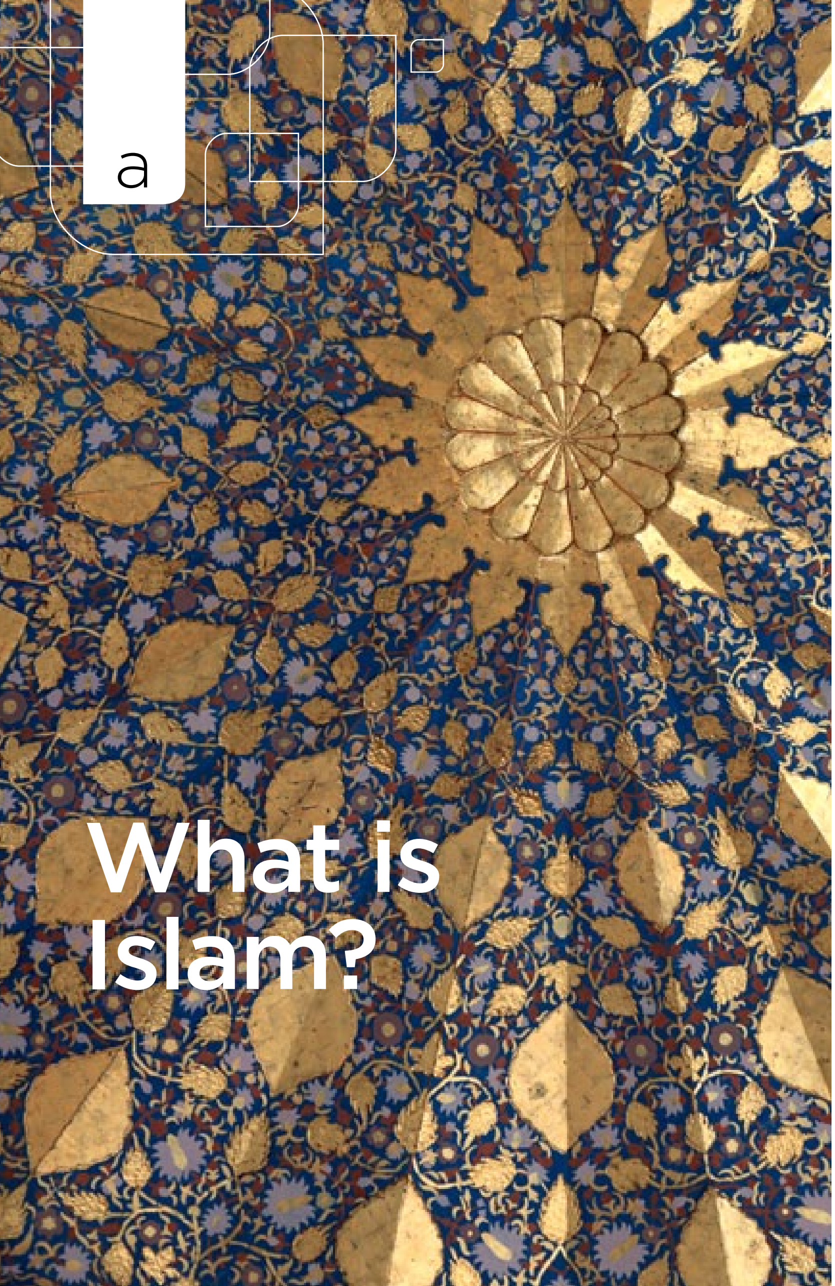
The state of Qatar has opened its gates to other cultures and civilisations while maintaining its local identity. Abdullah Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center is one of the most important landmarks, with its great design along with a spiral minaret that reflects light and guidance for the whole of mankind.

The very source of the culture of Qatar stems from the doctrines and cultures of Islam, and with this book we aim to provide you with a basic guide to the creed of not only this country, but also one fifth of the world's population. We have written this aimed at the modern day thinker, pondering about the very nature of the meaning of life and trying to clear some of the many misconceptions of today. We also hope to build bridges between the many communities both within Qatar and globally. By giving you this book we hope that this acts as a small gesture and will inspire you to visit our iconic centre.

Ahlan Wa Sahlan

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who strove to produce the series on Understanding Islam in the forms of posters, brochures, books and in e-media. The team of writers, proof readers, designers and managers all strove with one ultimate aim, to seek the pleasure of their Lord.

Abdullah Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Center



a

What is Islam?

Islam is the belief in one God, Allah. He is one Supreme Being without shape and form that we can comprehend.

In the Arabic language, the word Islam has many meanings. It comes from the root letters of س (*seen*) ل (*laam*) and م (*meem*), '*salaam*'. From these letters the meaning of 'Islam' is described literally as 'submission', 'surrender', 'peace', and 'safety'. *Salaam* is also known as one of Allah's attributes.

A Muslim is a person who submits himself to the worship of Allah and the teachings of Allah, therefore making all those who believed in the original message of the oneness of God Muslim. This includes all of the prophets from Adam through Noah, Moses and Jesus to Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon them all).

Islam has come as a mercy to mankind with a book of guidance called the *Qur'an*, the word of Allah – revealed 1400 years ago and unchanged ever since. This book, along with the teachings of the final messenger Muhammad, shows all of humanity how to behave in the way commanded by the Creator in all aspects of life, both material and spiritual.

A Muslim is a person who submits himself to the worship of Allah and the teachings of Allah…



b

The Creation

Is it not in the very nature of every human to look to the sky when he is in desperate of help?

When there is a loss, for him to cry out to his Lord? When he is in despair, to raise his eyes for help from a superior being? Surely, it is a very innate nature of the whole of mankind.

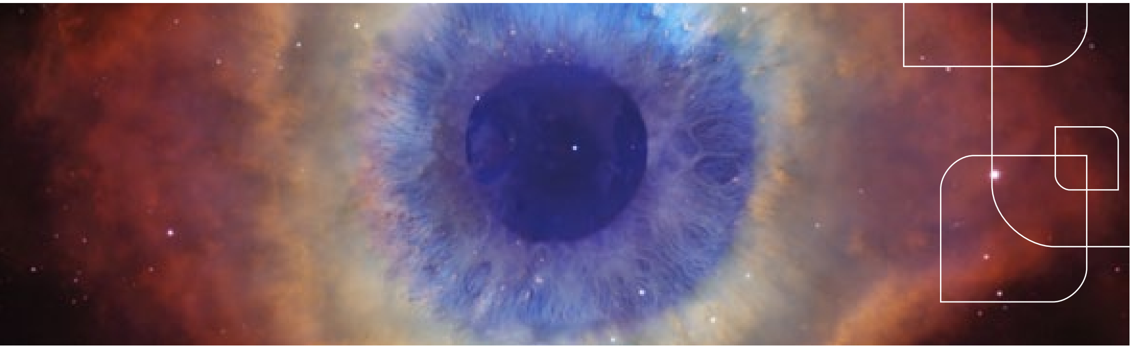
Every human has a natural inclination to ask certain questions about the purpose of life: what am I doing here? What is the purpose of life? Is there a Creator or did this all appear by random chance?

Until these questions are answered, a person's soul can never find peace and life will seem to be a futile and meaningless labour. The soul will be in constant turmoil in the uncertainty of what will happen next.

The Qur'an invites man to travel the earth, make his own observations and reflect on how creation was originated:

"Say [O Muhammad], 'Travel through the land and observe how He began creation. Then Allah will produce the final creation. Indeed Allah, over all things, is competent.'" (Qur'an 29: 20)

Creation of the Universe



...life would be unsustainable if the Earth's rotation wasn't exactly correct.

Just by reflecting on the vast and wonderful creation around us, every single human being can sit and contemplate about the world around him, and come to the conclusion that there must be one designer, one Creator to this magnificent universe.

When you read this page, look at the care that has gone into choosing each word, chapter, the structure and layout; you may wonder about their designer. You may think about the time each person took in choosing each letter carefully, picking the colours, choosing and placing each paragraph to have an overall effect on you – the reader.

What about YOU, the reader? What about YOUR design? Your intricate organs, the function of your eyes to take in this beautiful work, your heart that gets excited reading each word, the brain you are utilising? faster and more powerful than any man-made computer that is available. Who designed all of this?

What about the earth you stand upon, every one of the laws of biology, chemistry and physics, from the fundamental forces such as gravity and upthrust, to the structure of the atoms and elements that have been precisely tailored to make life possible?

Look at the Earth within the solar system, life would be unsustainable if the Earth's rotation wasn't exactly correct. Our solar system is one of many solar systems. Our Galaxy The Milky Way is only one of the 100 million galaxies in the universe. They are all in order and they are all precise. Instead of conflicting with one another they are swimming along in an orbit that has been set for them. Did human beings set that into motion and are human beings maintaining that precision? Could this just have come into being by a complete coincidence, a big bang without a designer?

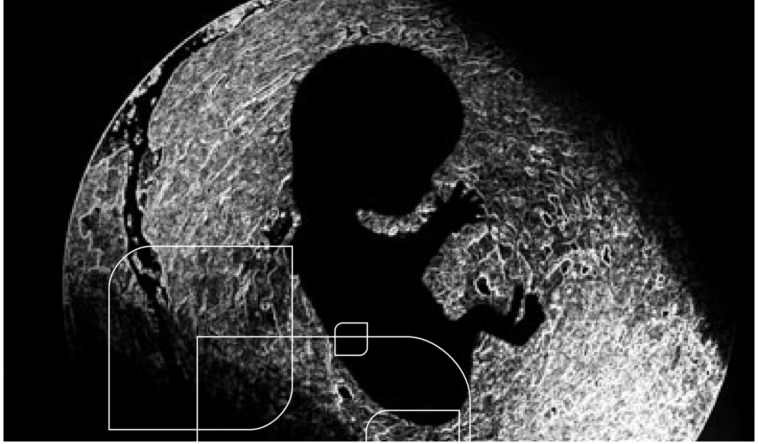
"Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?" (Qur'an 2: 30)

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding." (Qur'an 3: 190)

"And He has subjected for you the night and day and the sun and moon, and the stars are subjected by His command. Indeed in that are signs for a people who reason." (Qur'an 16: 12)

Creation of Mankind

Once we have accepted that there can only be one designer of all, we must look for an answer for our existence.



Man has been entrusted with the task of cultivating, maintaining and ruling the earth...

The Qur'an explains the creation of man in the following verse:

"O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them all men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the kinship. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer." (Qur'an 4: 1)

If you were to receive a gift, for no reason, a simple drink or a book, I'm sure you would be inclined to say, 'Thank you.' Surely the designer who gave you your eyes, heart and lungs should be thanked, acknowledged and praised. Allah tells us that this is the purpose of life; to acknowledge Him, worship Him and obey Him.

"And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (Qur'an 51: 56)

By acknowledging Him in all that we do, we thank Him for the food He provides, the drink to quench our thirst, the clothes we wear; everything should have some recognition for Him.

When it comes to the creation of man, it was made very clear in the beginning that when Allah created man it was not in vain, that he was created as God's vicegerent on earth. Man has been entrusted with the task of cultivating, maintaining and ruling the earth according to divine guidance with justice amongst all that exists.

"And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." (Qur'an 2: 30)

Also in the creation of mankind some of the divine attributes of mercy, forgiveness and kindness are manifest.

Is There Life after Death?

Muslims believe that this life is a transitory stage, a preparation for the eternal life in the Hereafter. Life on this earth is not the ultimate goal.

Death is not the end but a mere change of worlds, a stepping stone to the Hereafter; eternal bliss in heaven or torment in hell.

Allah will resurrect all on the Day of Judgement and mankind will be held accountable for their actions in accordance to them being honoured with intellect and free will. Mankind has been given the choice to follow divine guidance and reap its everlasting rewards in this life and the Hereafter.

A belief in life after death in Islam is a pillar of faith.

"Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained [his desire]. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion." *(Qur'an 3: 185)*



The Oneness of Allah

The very foundation of Islam is the belief in this one God. Allah was not born and will never die for it is a direct contradiction that the Creator of all must have been created himself.



Allah does not look like anything our minds, sights or thoughts can imagine...

Allah does not look like anything our minds, sights and thoughts can imagine as explained to us in the following chapter of the Qur'an:

"Say, 'He is Allah, [who is] One. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, Nor is there to Him any equivalent.'" (Qur'an 112: 1-4)

It does not make rational sense to bow down and prostrate to something that man has created with his own hands. From the beginning of time, the worst of sins was that of associating partners with Allah; by making idols to worship, and saying a created thing was Allah, or a child of Allah or an intermediary to Allah.

"Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. And he who associates others with Allah has certainly fabricated a tremendous sin." (Qur'an 4: 48)

Fundamental to the belief of Islam is that Allah has no sons or intermediaries. He sent prophets only to guide humanity, and they themselves were only men. Allah guides us to pray to Him directly, without the need for hierarchy in the religion. Praying to anyone else, for example a priest or a saint, to ask for help or support, is alien in Islam. Instead, prayer and supplication is a very personal thing between a believer and his Lord, Allah.

"Nor could he order you to take the angels and prophets as lords. Would he order you to disbelief after you had been Muslims?" (Qur'an 3: 80)



Attributes of God

To worship something that one has created with his own hands or to worship a fellow human being can never bring peace to the soul, yet the need to worship or revere is deep within every human.

In Islam we choose to worship one God, Allah and in His wisdom He has chosen to inform us of some of His names and attributes, so that we may understand Him better. Here are some examples of some of His attributes:

Allah is the Creator of all, the Sustainer of all that He has created, the All-Hearing, All-Seeing and All-Knowing. His knowledge is all perfect, including that which is in the past, the present and the future, whether a secret or not; He is the Most Gracious, Most Merciful and Most Beneficent. He is the Self Existing One and the Ever Living One, He never needs sleep or takes any rest. He has no partners, sons or parents and all worship must be directed to Him alone. He is the Shaper of Beauty, the Creator of Good and He is the Light and the Guide.

"He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, the Sovereign, the Pure, the Perfection, the Bestower of Faith, the Overseer, the Exalted in Might, the Compeller, the Superior. Exalted is Allah above whatever they associate with Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner; to Him belong the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise." (Qur'an 59: 23-24)

***AR-RAZZAAQ* (The Provider)**

"Say: 'Come I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them...'" (Qur'an 6: 151)

***AL-GHAFOOR* (The Forgiving)**

"But indeed, I am the Perpetual Forgiver of whoever repents and believes, and does righteousness and then continues in guidance." (Qur'an 20, 82)

***AL-QAYYUM* (The Sustainer)**

"Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of existence." (Qur'an 3, 2)



Five Pillars of Islam

As the pillars holding up a building are important to its structure and stability, likewise the 5 pillars of Islam are important to every Muslim.

They provide the outward steadiness and constancy to a person's faith and hold Muslims together as a brotherhood. The first pillar is the Declaration of Faith (*Shahadah*), the second, Prayer (*Salah*), the third, Obligatory Charity (*Zakah*), the fourth Fasting (*Sawm*) and the fifth, Pilgrimage (*Hajj*).



The Declaration of Faith '*Shahadah*'

This is the most significant pillar of belief; declaring outwardly, **"There is none worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad is the final messenger of Allah."**

The is the agreement between you and Allah, confirming that you accept the belief in one God (Allah), and that Muhammad was sent as His final messenger and prophet. The result of this makes you part of the Muslim community, which is there to help and support you in achieving your goals and understanding your purpose in life.

This is the agreement between you and Allah…



Prayer ‘*Salah*’

The relationship between a Muslim and Allah is very important, and is made more unique by praying directly to Him, without any intercessor.

We are commanded to pray five times a day, increasing us in the remembrance of Allah, keeping us on the path of good, and wiping away the sins.

“And establish prayer and give zakah, and whatever good you put forward for yourselves – you will find it with Allah. Indeed Allah, of what you do, is seeing.” (Qur’an 2: 110)



Obligatory Charity ‘*Zakah*’

As well as looking after one’s own self, Allah tells us to look after people less fortunate than ourselves.

The word zakah comes from the meanings “purification” and “growth”. A believer helps another by giving a portion of his wealth to the less fortunate once a year. This is most commonly calculated at just 2.5% of an individual’s wealth. It is given to, amongst others, the poor, the needy, and the stranded traveller. It differs from ordinary charity in that it is not optional. In Islam wealth belongs to Allah, and is held by people in trust, so they should use it to the benefit of society.

It is given to amongst others the poor, the needy, and the stranded traveller.

“And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, (being) sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give zakah. And that is the correct religion.” (Qur’an 98: 5)



Fasting ‘*Sawm*’

Every year in the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the lunar year), all Muslims fast from dawn until sundown, abstaining from food, drink, and marital relations with the explicit intention of doing so for the sake of Allah.

“The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur’an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey – then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period [of fasting] and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you, and perhaps you will be grateful.” (Qur’an 2: 185)

Allah commands us to fast in order to seek His pleasure, and in doing so we raise our levels of spirituality trying to get closer to Allah. By changing our habits and daily routines in accordance to divine orders, we learn that we are not the slaves of our habits but the servants of Allah. By cutting oneself off voluntarily from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person also gains true sympathy with those who go without food and water on a regular basis.

> *…we learn that we are not the slaves of our habits but the servants of Allah.*

Pilgrimage ‘*Hajj*’

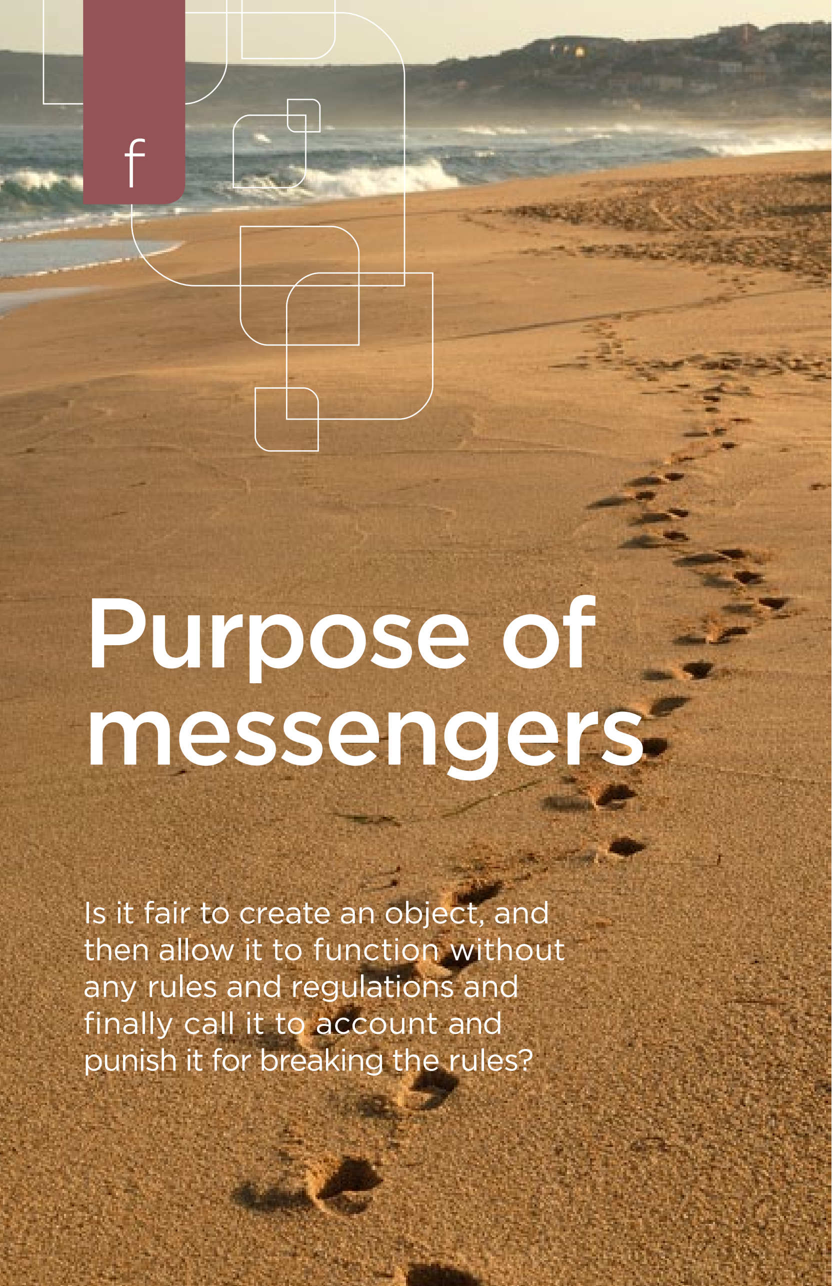
If the conditions of Hajj are met, such as having enough wealth, Allah has made the pilgrimage to Makkah obligatory, once in a person’s life. The rituals of Hajj date back to the time of prophet Abraham and commemorate some of the trials he and his family faced in Makkah. It is also a journey to the Ka’bah; the symbolic building whose location was originally chosen by prophet Adam.

The Hajj is a time when Muslims from all around the world of different races, colours and languages come together in a spirit of universal brotherhood to worship Allah. The men wear two unsewn pieces of cloth, making them one people without any class or distinction. The rich, the poor, the black and the white stand side by side, equal in the eyes of Allah apart from their deeds.

The celebrations of the Hajj and the Eid Al-Adha are a remembrance for those who are needy, and a day of worship to Allah. The meat of the sacrifice is distributed to the needy, and extra prayers are offered.

“Hajj is [during] well-known months, so whoever has made hajj obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of ihram], there is [to be for him] no sexual relations and no disobedience and no disputing during hajj. And whatever good you do – Allah knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah. And fear Me, O you of understanding.” (Qur’an 2: 197)





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Purpose of messengers

Is it fair to create an object, and then allow it to function without any rules and regulations and finally call it to account and punish it for breaking the rules?

Having created man with the power of thought and free will, Allah sent prophets and messengers as a guide for mankind. Each prophet was sent to his particular people to remind them of the need to worship one God, and refrain from associating partners with Him. They were not gods, sons or partners of God, but were simply the best of mankind, chosen because of their humility in their behaviour, morals, peacefulness and knowledge of Allah.

Allah sent a long chain of prophets from the first days of mankind, from prophet Adam (the Father of human beings) – and sealed them with prophet Muhammad, the final prophet (peace be upon them). This long chain included the prophets of the people of Israel and the five great messengers who came with the most important messages: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (May Allah's peace and blessings be upon them all).

Prophets were the leaders of humanity who knew how to worship one God. They knew about the Hereafter, about good morals and human rights and they guided their people to the same. The Holy Qur'an tells us that every messenger said to his people:

Prophets were the leaders of humanity who knew how to worship one God.

"O my people, worship Allah; You have no deity other than Him..." (Qur'an 7: 59)

"Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct, and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded." (Qur'an 16: 90)

Mohammed was the final of these messengers, who brought Allah's message for the whole of mankind from the first day of revelation to the final day of our existence. Because of this we see Muslims from all over the globe, of all colours and races, accepting and respecting all of the prophets of Allah, as they were all on the same path of worshipping one God.

Prophet Noah
The Second Father of Humanity

The Holy Books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam speak the same way about prophet Noah and the great flood.



His story is detailed in one of the longest chapters of the Qur'an called Hud...

The Qur'an tells us that he was a messenger who lived for 950 years. He selflessly dedicated his life to preaching to his people the belief in one God, to leave worshipping idols and statues and to be merciful to the weak and the needy. He told them about the signs of God's Power and Mercy and warned them about the severe punishment on the Day of Judgement, but they were very stubborn and ignored his warnings. Allah punished them with the great flood and saved only the believers who followed the prophet.

There is a chapter in the Holy Qur'an about prophet Noah. His story is detailed in one of the longest chapters of the Qur'an called Hud, the 11th Chapter, with more details about the flood and the ship including these points:

- Noah asked the people to serve Allah and keep their duty unto Allah, so that sins may be forgiven.
- Noah called them night and day, but they thrust their fingers in their ears and persisted in their refusal.
- He asked them to seek pardon of their Ever-Forgiving Lord and He will help them with wealth and sons, and will assign unto them gardens and rivers and a good life.
- Allah the Almighty told Noah that none of these people will believe except those who have believed already, He instructs Noah to build the ship through inspiration. When Noah's people passed by him, they made a mockery of him.
- When Noah finished building the ship, Allah ordered Noah to load therein two of every kind, a pair (the male and female), most of his household, and those who believed.
- And it was said: 'O earth! Swallow your water and, O sky! Be cleared of clouds!' And the water was made to subside. And the commandment was fulfilled. And as the ship came to rest upon (the mount) Al-Judi with Noah and the believers, humanity was given another opportunity for a new beginning.

Prophet Abraham The Father of the Prophets



> *He entered into serious debates with the monks of his day, refuting their tendency to worship idols, stars and fire.*

Prophet Abraham is one of the most brilliant personalities in history, be it in the area of religion, morals, social life or fatherhood.

He in reality is the Father of the prophets because Allah the Almighty chose many prophets from his offspring including Isaac, Jacob, David and their sons, along with Ishmael the forefather of the last messenger Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them all).

There are long chapters in the Qur'an about prophet Abraham. His biography and glorious deeds are mentioned in different places of the Qur'an.

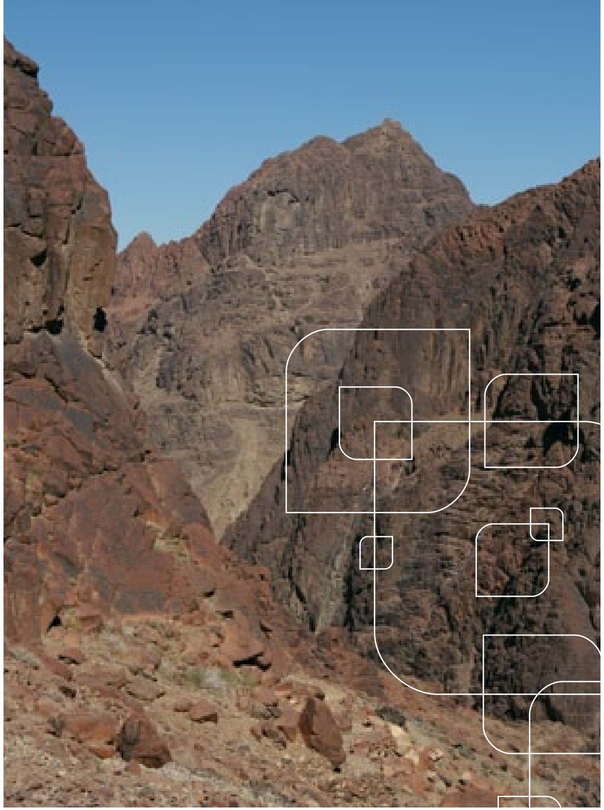
Abraham thought about the oneness of the Creator from a very early age. He entered into serious debates with the monks of his day, refuting their tendency to worship idols, stars and fire. He told them that these idols are not worthy or eligible of worship, so they tried to burn him alive. Allah saved him from the heat of the fire and chose him as a prophet to guide his people.

He was a prophet, model father and a model son. Here are some glimpses about his life mentioned in the Qur'an:

- *Abraham was a very obedient son to his disbelieving father, kind and very patient.*
- *Allah showed him the kingdom of the heavens and the earth so that he should be of those possessing certainty.*
- *He debated with his people about the false celestial gods and declared that he can not worship them because they are not worthy.*
- *Allah the Almighty mentioned him in the Qur'an as a chosen one: "And mention in the Book (the story of) Abraham. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet." (Qur'an 19: 41)*
- Allah gave him the wisdom and ability to affect others: *"And that was Our [conclusive] argument which We gave Abraham against his people. We raise by degrees whom We will. Indeed, your Lord is Wise and Knowing." (Qur'an 6: 83)*

Prophet Moses *(Kalamullah)*

Prophet Moses was a major prophet and a leader who freed the Children of Israel from the oppression of Pharaoh; he is not only referred to in Judaism and Christianity but also in Islam.



In the Qur'an, it is mentioned that Moses was chosen above other men with the mission Allah had entrusted to him.

Prophet Moses is the most frequently mentioned of all prophets in the Qur'an; 136 times in thirty-four chapters and he is included in the authenticated sayings of prophet Muhammad.

The birth of Moses and his entrance to the Pharaoh's palace, his trip to Madyan, selection as a prophet, dispatch to the Pharaoh to save the Children of Israel, struggle with Pharaoh and the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, the revelation of divine commands on Mount Sinai, events in the desert and his leadership of the Children of Israel are all discussed clearly in the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an, it is mentioned that Moses was chosen above other men with the mission Allah had entrusted to him. The words that Allah had spoken to him (Qur'an 7: 143), the fact that he was covered with the garment of love from Allah, as well as being reared under Allah's eye (Qur'an 20: 39), all indicate the preparation of Moses for Allah's service (Qur'an 20: 41).

In the Qur'an, Moses is depicted as a prophet who gives glad tidings about the coming of prophet Muhammad; the Qur'an also tells us that the coming of an illiterate prophet was mentioned in the Torah and Gospel (Qur'an 7: 157).

In Islamic tradition Moses is called '*Kalamullah*', whom the Lord spoke to, because Allah spoke to him and revealed His verses to him directly.



Prophet Jesus
The Great messenger

To aid him in his quest, Jesus was given the ability to perform miracles, with the permission of Allah.

Jesus in Islam is a messenger of God who had been sent to guide '*Bani Israel*', the Children of Israel, with a new scripture, the '*Injil*' or the Gospel.

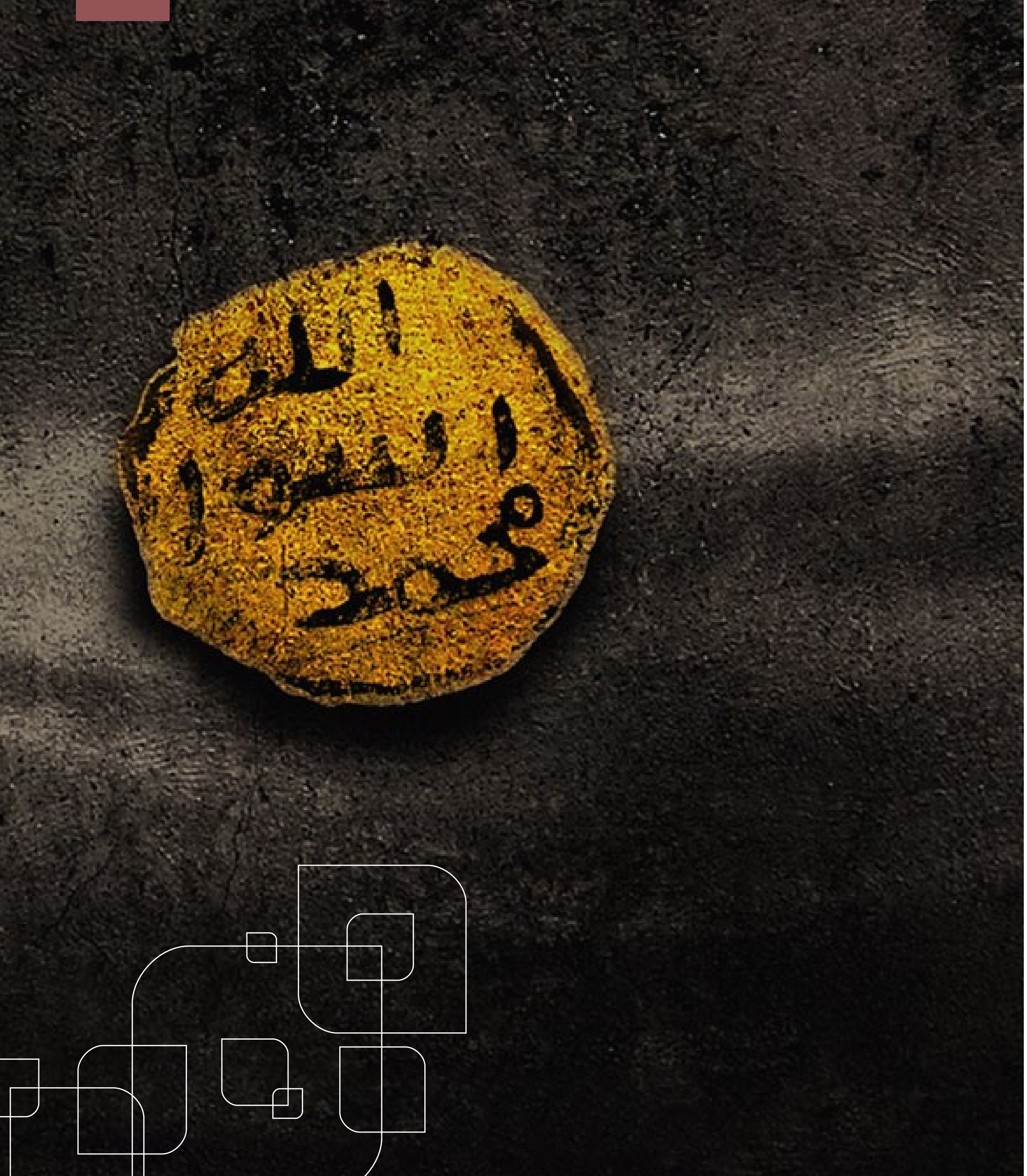
The Qur'an states that Mary gave birth to Jesus without a man having touched her, a miraculous event which occurred by the decree of God.

"And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place towards the east...Then We sent to her Our Angel [i.e. Gabriel], and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man... He said, 'I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy [i.e. son].' She said, 'How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?' He said, 'Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, "It is easy for Me and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed." ' " (Qur'an 19: 16-21)

To aid him in his quest, Jesus was given the ability to perform miracles, with the permission of Allah. According to Islamic texts, Jesus was neither killed nor crucified, but rather he was raised alive up to heaven. Islamic traditions narrate that he will return to earth near the Day of Judgement to restore justice and defeat the Antichrist.

Like all prophets in Islam, Jesus is considered to have been a Muslim, as he preached for people to adopt the straight path in submission to God's will. Islam rejects that Jesus was God or the son of God, stating that he was an ordinary human being who, like other prophets, had been divinely chosen to spread God's message.

Islamic texts forbid the association of partners with God, emphasising the notion of God's Divine Oneness. Numerous titles are given to Jesus in the Qur'an, such as 'al-Maseeh, but they do not correspond with the meaning accrued in Christian belief; rather Jesus is the son of Mary and Almighty God's servant. Jesus is seen in Islam as a precursor to Muhammad, and is believed by Muslims to have foretold his coming.



Prophet Muhammad
The Seal of the messengers

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was born in Makkah in the year 570 CE. As an orphan, he was raised by his uncle who was from the respected tribe of Quraysh.

As he grew up, he became known to be truthful, honest, generous, and sincere. So much so, that they called him 'The Trustworthy'. Muhammad was very pious, and he had long detested the decadence and idolatry of his society. At the age of 40, Muhammad received his first revelation from Allah through the Angel Gabriel. The revelations of the words of Allah continued for 23 years, and they are collectively known as the Qur'an.

As soon as he began to recite the Qur'an and preach the truth which Allah had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered persecution from the society around them. The persecution grew so fierce that in the year 622 CE Allah gave them the command to migrate to Madinah.

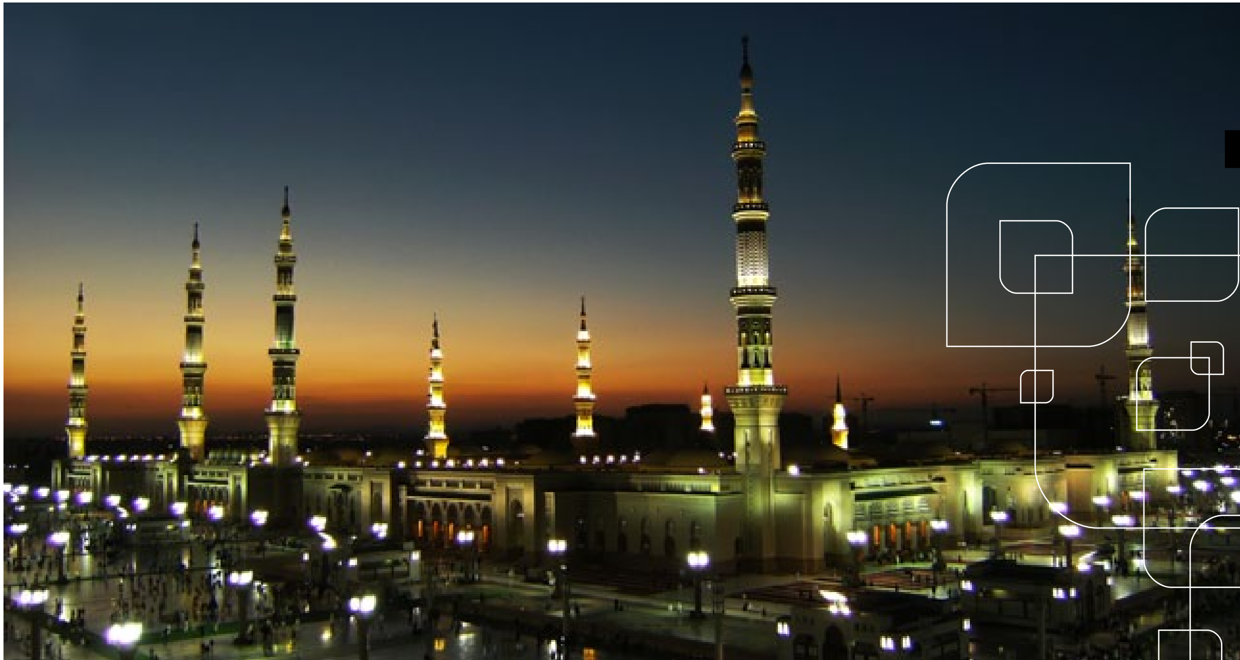
The revelations of the words of Allah continued for 23 years, and they are collectively known as the Qur'an.

After several years, Muhammad and his followers returned to Makkah and, having peacefully conquered it, so they forgave their enemies who had once persecuted them relentlessly. Before Muhammad died at the age of 63, the greater part of the Arabian Peninsula had become Muslim, and within a century of his death Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China. Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the truth and clarity of its doctrine.

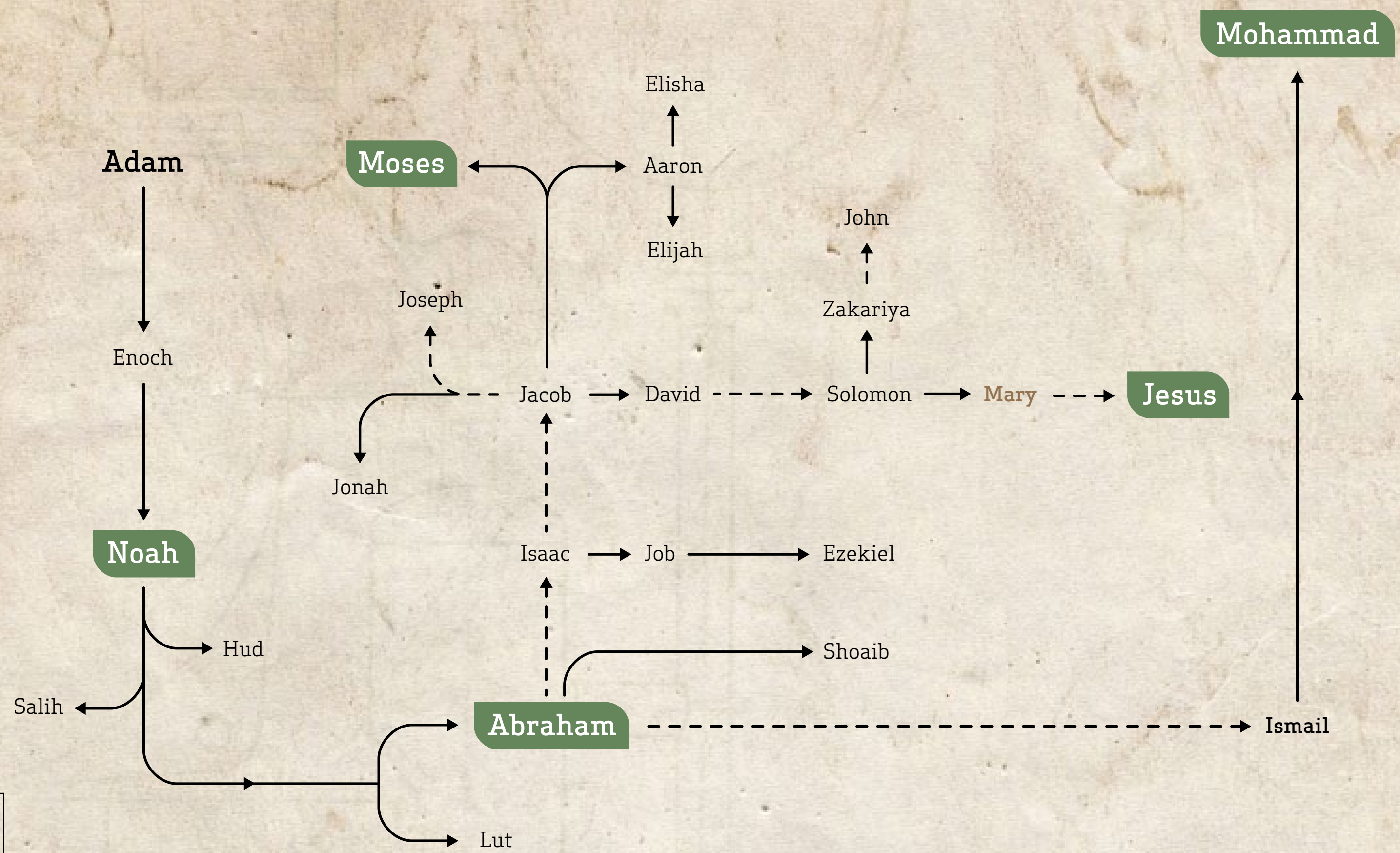
Prophet Muhammad was a perfect example of an honest, just, merciful, compassionate, truthful, and brave human being. Though he was a man, he was far removed from all evil characteristics and strove solely for the sake of Allah and his reward in the Hereafter. Moreover, in all of his actions and dealings, he was ever mindful and fearful of God.

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the truth and clarity of its doctrine.

"O Mankind, the messenger has come to you with the truth from your Lord, so believe; it is better for you. But if you disbelieve – then indeed, to Allah belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and earth. And ever is Allah Knowing and Wise." (Qur'an 4: 170)



Summary of the Family Tree of the Prophets



Descendant

Father/Mother & son

Ulu'l Azm (Arch-Prophets) Messengers of the most strongest will

Siddiqa - Righteous person who believed in Allah and was devoutly obedient



The Previous Books

Throughout time, Allah sent many prophets to guide humanity to worship Him alone. In essence, the message has been the same from the first prophet Adam to the final prophet Muhammad in that humanity has been asked to worship one God and one God alone.

There were five major prophets who were given divine knowledge with which to guide their people, which included scriptures to help guide the people. All of these books have been changed from their original text by mankind with the exception of the Qur'an, which has never to this day been altered or re-issued as a new version.

The previous books were sent to Abraham (the Scrolls), to Moses (the Torah and the Tablets), to David (the Psalms), to Jesus (the Gospel), and to Muhammad (the Qur'an). The Qur'an does not exclude the possibility that additional holy books were sent to other prophets, but does not mention any. The Sunnah (traditions of prophet Muhammad) narrates that the prophets counted scores of thousands, but those mentioned in the Qur'an, some with holy books others without. (See The Family Tree of prophets). The Islamic belief is to acknowledge and accept these previous books in their original form.

"...All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.'" (Qur'an 2: 285)

The Holy Qur’an

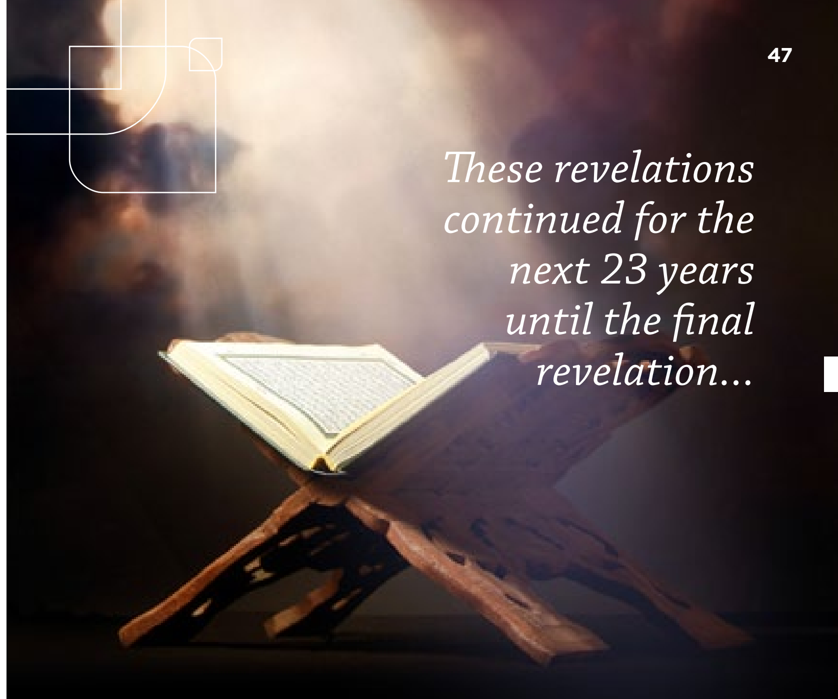
This is certainly the most important revelation for Muslims. Islamic beliefs about revelation are based on the Qur’an (the Islamic holy book). The Qur’an is different from any other book because it is composed entirely of the words of Allah.

In 611CE the prophet Muhammad was reflecting in a cave when the Angel Gabriel appeared to him. Muhammad was unlettered but three times Gabriel ordered him to ‘read’:

The angel said: *“Read! In the name of your Lord and Cherisher, who created, created man, out of a [mere] clot of blood. Read! And your Lord Is Most Bountiful, He who taught [the use of] the pen, taught man that which he knew not.” (Qur’an 96: 1-5)*

Gabriel then told Muhammad that he was to be the messenger of Allah. These revelations continued for the next 23 years until the final revelation:

“This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (Qur’an 5: 3)



Muhammad remained unlettered and the Qur’an was written down directly by his companions, who also memorised it by heart. The Qur’an has 114 surahs, or chapters, arranged in the order decreed by Allah and conveyed by the Angel Gabriel. For Muslims the Qur’an contains only the literal unchanged words of Allah. It is direct revelation from Allah to humanity. Because the Qur’an is the word of Allah it cannot be contradicted.

To preserve the true words of Allah, the Qur’an is always recited for worship in Arabic, because the true meaning of the words can only be found in the Arabic language, however, there are interpretations of the meanings in other languages. The Qur’an is the last and most complete book of guidance from Allah and applies to all people forever. It is still widely memorised to perfection, throughout the globe and is the central part of every Muslim’s daily life. In his sermon on Mount Arafat, Muhammad made it clear that this was the final revelation; No prophet or messenger will come after him and no new faith will emerge.



The Sacred Mosque in Makkah

There are three Holy sites of Islam that a Muslim is recommended to journey to: the Sacred Mosque in Makkah, the prophet's Mosque in Al-Madinah and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

The virtues of these mosques are stated in the following sayings of the prophet Muhammad:

"Set out deliberately on a journey only to three mosques: this mosque of mine [in Al-Madinah], the Sacred Mosque [in Makkah], and al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem]." (Bukhari and Muslim)

"A prayer in the Sacred Mosque [in Makkah] is worth 100,000 prayers more than in any other mosque, a prayer in my mosque [in Madinah] is worth 1,000 more, and a prayer in Jerusalem [al-Aqsa Mosque] is worth 500." (Bukhari)

"The first house [of worship] appointed for mankind was that at Bakka [Makkah]; full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings." (Qur'an 3: 96)

The Holy Mosque in Makkah is built around the Ka'bah, the first house consecrated to the worship of the One True God. The Ka'bah is the simple cube building which is completely empty, raised by prophet Abraham and his son prophet Ishmael on the original foundations laid down by Adam. At the eastern corner of the Ka'bah there is a black stone known as 'al-Hajar al–Aswad' which is the only remnant of the original building that was built by prophet Abraham and his son.

The Ka'bah is the direction to which Muslims turn in prayer.

The Ka'bah is the direction to which Muslims turn in prayer. Neither the Ka'bah nor the Black Stone are objects of worship but serve as a focal point that unifies Muslims in worship.

Prophet Mohammed narrated about the Ka'bah: *"You are sacred, but the blood of a believer is more sacred to Allah than you." (Sahih)*

The Prophet's Mosque in Madinah

One of the earliest mosques built in Islam was the one built in Al-Madinah by the prophet Muhammad in the year 622 CE. It was a very simple structure made from adobe bricks and stone.



Adjacent to the mosque was the modest house of the prophet Muhammad in which he was later buried along with two of his companions; Abu Bakr As-Saddiq and Umar Ibn Al-Khattab. The mosque acted as a centre for the community, not only allowing facilities for learning and celebrations, but distributing charity, writing to other heads of state and meeting delegations. After the establishment of the mosque, the Muslim community spread around it so that it became the very heart of the state.

Successive expansions throughout history have made the prophet's Mosque the magnificent architectural masterpiece it is today. Adjacent to the mosque is the beautiful green dome under which the grave of prophet Muhammad can be found.

There is an area within the Mosque, between the the pulpit and the grave of prophet Mohammed, called "*Ar-Rawda As-Shareefa*" where Muslims prefer to pray as they consider the area a place from Paradise.



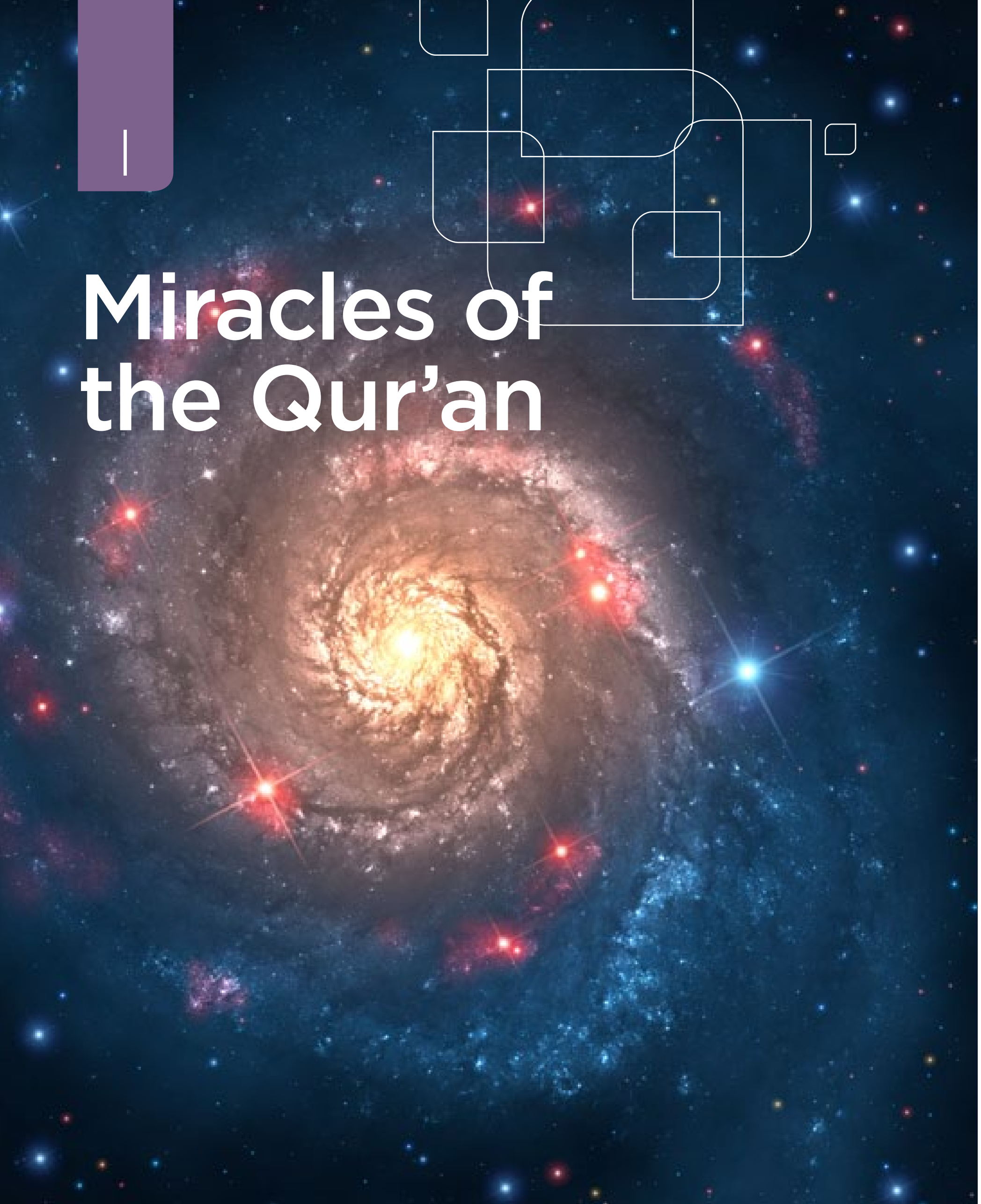
Al-Aqsa

"Exalted is He who took His Servant [prophet Muhammad] by night from Al-Masjid Al-Haram to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing." (Qur'an 17, 1)

Al-Aqsa Mosque in the city of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is the third holiest site in Islam. It is dear to the hearts of Muslims as it was the first mosque that they turned to in prayer before the Ka'bah. It is also the mosque that the prophet Muhammad was taken to on the night journey (Isra` and Miraaj) and the place where he led all the prophets in prayer.

Al-Aqsa Mosque is the entire noble sanctuary, which includes not only Umar's Mosque but also the Dome of the Rock and other landmarks inside the stone fence totalling more than 200 places. The entire area covers over 144,000 square metres and encompasses over one sixth of Jerusalem's old city. Prayer anywhere within the enclosed sanctuary will be weighed 500 times more than prayer in a regular mosque, in terms of reward.

Prayer anywhere within the enclosed sanctuary will be weighed 500 times more than prayer...



Miracles of the Qur’an

Some questions must be created in the mind of a reader when a book talks of the embryological development of the foetus, talks of the formation of the clouds and rain, talks of the seas and their properties many miles below the surface, yet all of this without man having created a microscope, plane or submarine.

The Qur’an was revealed to a man in the middle of the Arabian desert, over 1400 years ago. A man who could neither read nor write. What questions does this raise about the Qur’an and its miraculous nature? In today’s age of science and modern technology, we are constantly learning new facts and figures. By taking a minute to think of what role religion has played in teaching us about the world around us, you may be surprised to know what information we have received through the Qur’an.



The Embryo

From the beginning stages of development, the Qur'an accurately portrays the growth of the embryo. Firstly, is the *'Nutfah'* or drop stage: this is when a sperm combines with the female egg to form the zygote which has the shape of a drop of fluid; hence the name *'Nutfah'*.

The following stage is the *'Alaqah'*; which in Arabic has three meanings; leech, suspended thing and blood clot. The embryo not only resembles a leech, but it also uses the mother's blood to feed from. As it grows, it starts to take on a form which holds onto the womb of the mother, as if suspended. The final step of the *'Alaqah'* stage is where the embryo takes on large amounts of blood from the mother; the fact that the blood does not begin to circulate at this time makes it look like a blood clot.

Next is the *'Mudghah'* stage. In Arabic this has the same meaning as a chewed-like substance. The growing spine of the baby resembles that of a chewed substance. After that comes *'Izam'*. The next stage described in the Qur'an is that of the bones being clothed with flesh which accurately describes how the muscles start to form around the bones.

What has been revealed to us in the Qur'an about embryology over 1400 years ago has only been discovered by modern science in the last few decades. Even as late as the 17th century, with the invention of the microscope, it was believed that sperm contained miniature human beings.

"And certainly did We create man from an extract of clay. Then we placed him as a sperm – drop in a firm lodging [i.e. the womb]. Then we made the clot into a lump [of flesh], and We made [from] the lump, bones, and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the best of Creators." (Qur'an 23: 12-14)

What has been revealed to us in the Qur'an about embryology over 1400 years ago has only been discovered by modern science in the last few decades.

The Drowning of Pharaoh

In the time of prophet Moses Pharaoh was a dominant force, who refused to believe in the Oneness of Allah.

He was haughty and arrogant and spent his life threatening the life of the prophet. Even when Moses warned him he would be drowned, he still refused to believe. Only when faced with certain death did he proclaim he believed in Allah;

"We took the Children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh and his soldiers pursued them in tyranny and enmity until, when drowning overtook him, he said: 'I believe that there is no deity except that in whom the Children of Israel believe and I am of the Muslims.'" (Qur'an 10: 90)

"Allah responded; *'Now? And you disobeyed [Him] before and were of the corrupters? So today We will save you in body that you may be to those who succeed you a sign. And indeed, many among the people, of Our signs, are heedless.'"* (Qur'an 10: 91-92)

Even when Moses warned him he would be drowned, he still refused to believe.





Roots of Mountains are like Pegs

When making a tent using pegs to hold the ropes and material up, you will know that the majority of the peg disappears into the soil, whilst a small amount remains above the ground.

This technique is used to support the tent and to stop it from falling down. The Qur'an describes mountains as pegs, a theory that Sir George Airy only introduced in 1865. Modern advances in geology show that mountains sit on deep bedded roots, which hold them up and stabilise the crust of the earth.

"Allah tells us in the Qur'an: 'Have We not made the earth a resting place? And the mountains as pegs?' " (Qur'an 78: 6-7)

"And He has cast into the earth firmly set mountains, lest it shift with you, and (made) rivers and roads, that you may be guided." (Qur'an 16: 15)

A Natural Barrier Between Seas



Scientists have recently proven that where two bodies of water come together there is a barrier undetectable to the human eye which maintains the salinity, temperature and density of each, with neither transgressing the other.

This can be observed where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic Ocean. When it comes to sweet water meeting salt water in estuaries this is also true. This 'barrier' was mentioned in the Qur'an over 1400 years ago.

"He released the two seas, meeting [side by side]; Between them is a barrier [so] neither of them transgresses." (Qur'an 55: 19-20)

"'And it is He who has released [simultaneously] the two seas, one fresh and sweet and one salty and bitter, and He placed between them a barrier and prohibiting partition." (Qur'an 25: 53)

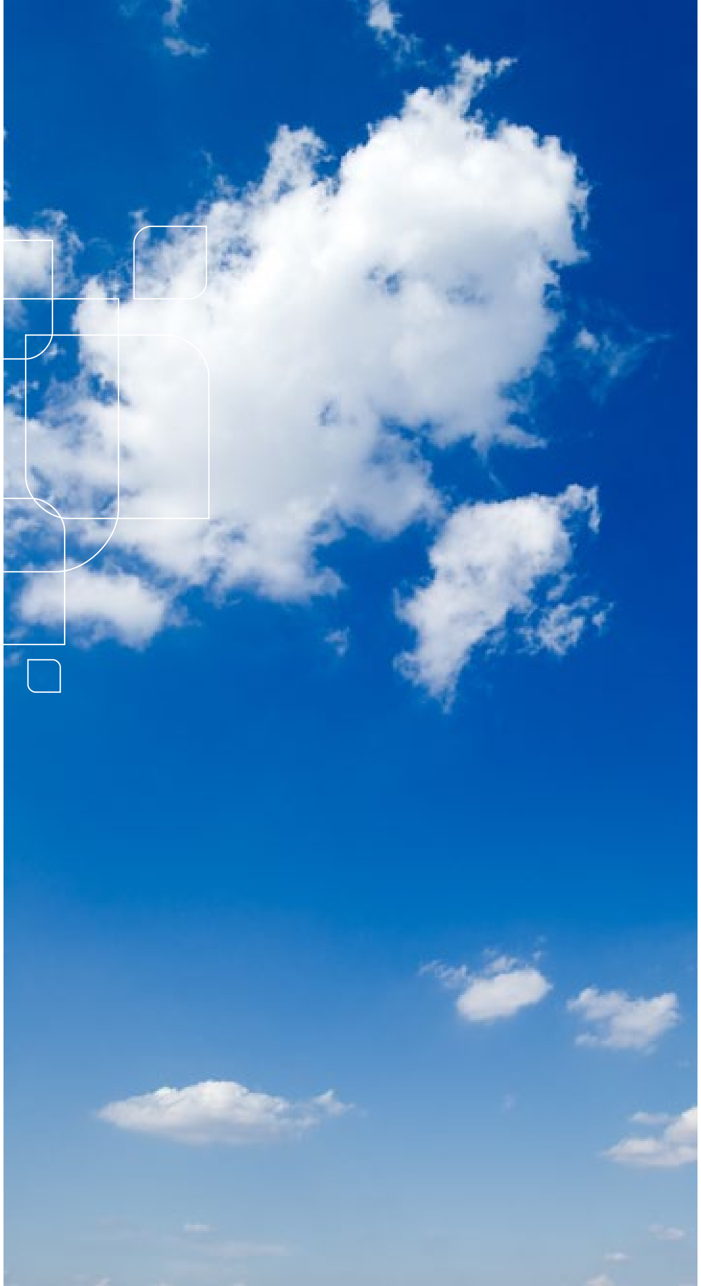
What is interesting is that pearl divers in the Gulf knew of this natural phenomenon.

What is interesting is that pearl divers in the Gulf knew of this natural phenomena. There are in the salty waters of the Arabian Gulf, 'springs' of sweet water that lie about four to six metres below sea level. During the long months at sea pearl divers would frequent these springs, where they would dive to replenish their stores of fresh water. One such famous spring is *'Ain Ighmisa'* which lies to the north-east of the city of Jubail in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Qur'an on the topic of Clouds

After the modern day study of clouds, scientists have deduced that rain clouds are formed and shaped according to certain systems.

An example of this is the cumulonimbus cloud and how they produce rain, hail and lightning taking many steps; smaller cumulus clouds are pushed together by winds to an area where they start to join together to form into larger cumulonimbus clouds. They are then stacked one on top of each other where updrafts within



The cloud stretches into cooler regions of the atmosphere causing drops of water and hail to formulate...

the larger clouds cause the body to grow vertically in size. The cloud stretches into cooler regions of the atmosphere causing drops of water and hail to formulate and begin to grow larger and larger. After the weight of these reaches a certain point, they fall to the earth.

"....And He sends down from the sky, mountains [of clouds] within which is hail, and He strikes with it whom He wills, and averts it from whom He wills. The flash of its lightning almost takes away the eyesight." (Qur'an 24: 43)

Linguistic Miracles of The Qur'an



The Holy Qur'an was revealed at a time where people used poetry and words to dazzle their audience, resulting in contests between people and the emergence of a high level of eloquence in the Arabic language.

Muhammad was a man, who for 40 years of his life, upto the point of receiving revelation, stayed away from the poets of Arabia. Yet the words that were revealed to him and were passed to the people around were finer, more tremendous and more rhythmical than any one had heard before.

To those who doubted the source of the Qur'an, a challenge was set out by Allah, to produce a single chapter like the chapters of the Qur'an with their beauty, eloquence, splendour, judicious legislation, factual information, accurate prophecy, and other perfect attributes. No one has ever been able to meet this challenge, then or today. Neither will anybody be able to meet it in the future.

To those who doubted the source of the Qur'an, a challenge was set out by Allah, to produce a single chapter like the chapters of the Qur'an...

Allah says in the Qur'an; *"Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an? If it had been from (any) other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction."* (Qur'an 4: 82)

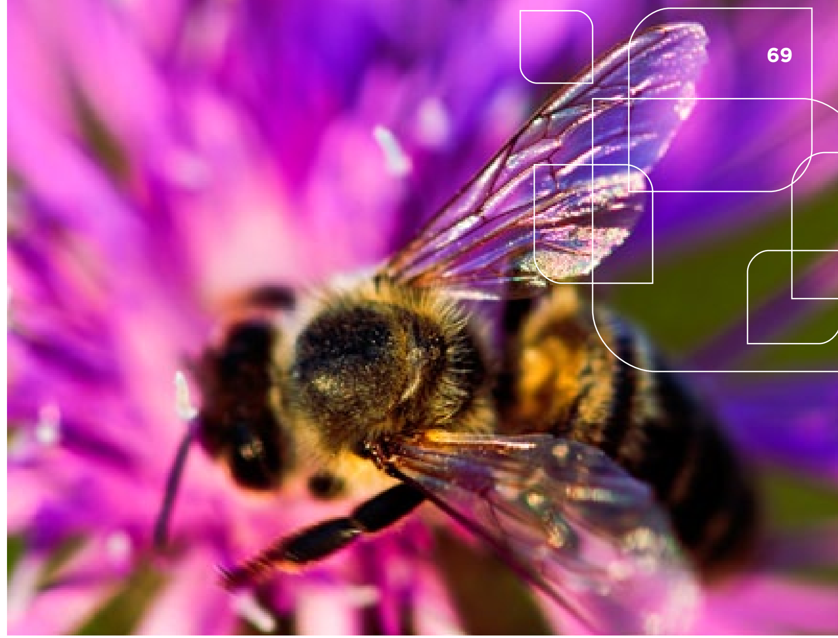
"And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down [the Qur'an] upon Our Servant [prophet Muhammad], then produce a surah (a chapter) the like thereof and call upon your witnesses [supporters] other than Allah, if you should be truthful. But if you do not – and you will never be able to – then fear the Fire.." (Qur'an 2: 23-25)

"So when the Qur'an is recited, then listen to it and pay attention that you may receive mercy." (Qur'an 7: 204)

"[This is] a blessed book which We have revealed to you [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and those of understanding would be reminded." (Qur'an 38: 29)

The Qur'an & Biology

Allah created the Earth as we know it in perfection, from the design of the cell that makes up all living matter to the order in which the laws of nature function.



The Qur'an describes in varying levels of details many biological wonders, again many of them discussed, taught, and a cause for enlightenment to the rest of the world.

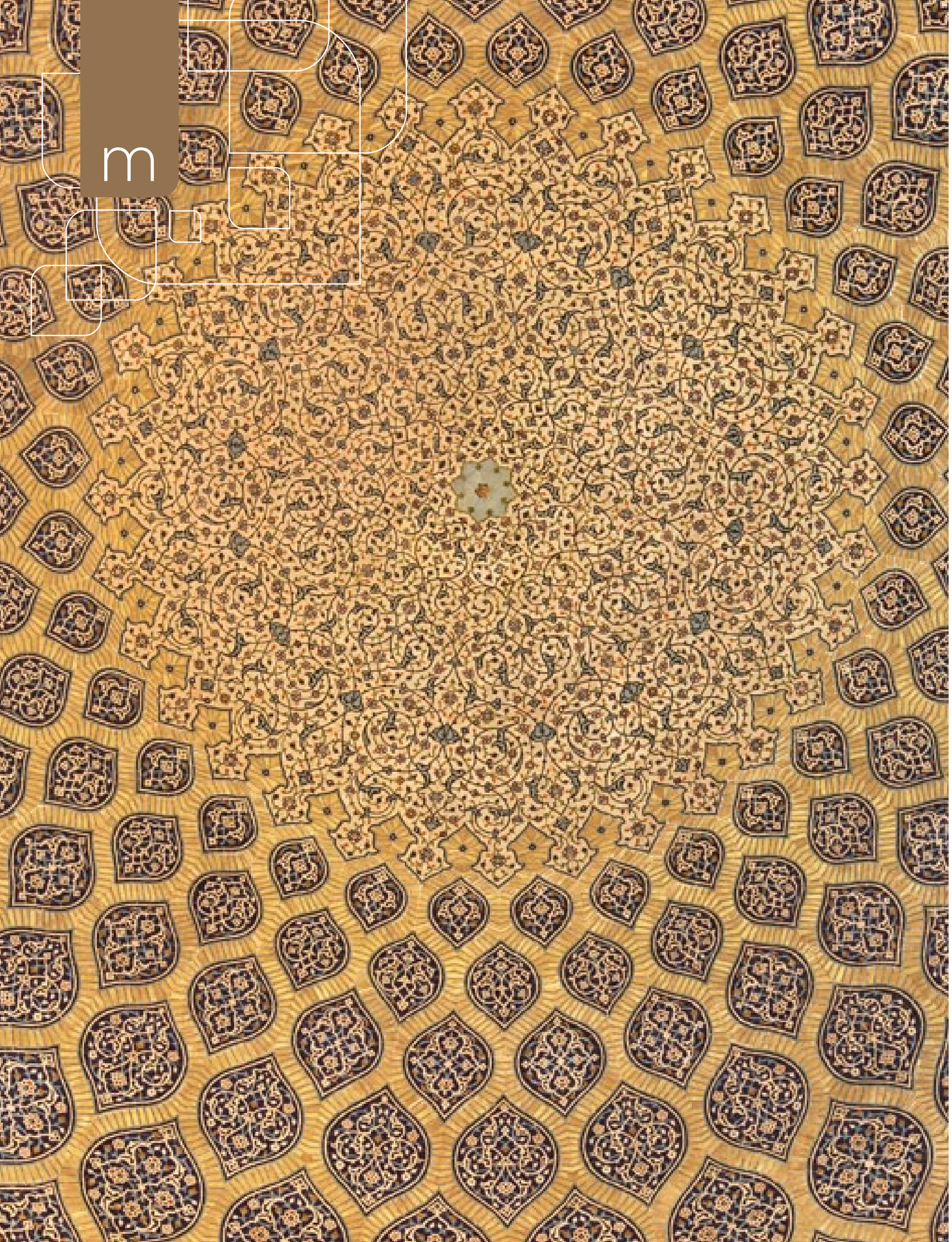
The invention of the microscope advanced the development of science, and it is modern scientific study that discovered that a large percentage of living cells are made up of water. This fact was known to Muslims many hundreds of years previously, and when mentioned in the Qur'an it is followed by a request to ponder about the Creator of mankind.

'We... made from water every living thing...Then will they not believe?' (Qur'an 21:30)

In one example when the Qur'an discusses the Honey Bee, the worker producing the honey, cleaning and defending the hive, looking after the young, feeding the queen and building the honeycomb, the word used is in its female form. This may not seem significant, yet it was the focus of years of scholarly work. Jan Swammerdam in the 1600s was writing about "King" bees having an ovary, while Richard Remnant in 1637 wrote that all worker bees were in fact female. Over 1000 years earlier this was common knowledge for Muslims. Other aspects that are discussed are the healing properties of honey, something that is widely accepted today.

"And your Lord inspired to the bee, 'Take for yourself among the mountains, houses, and among the trees and [in] that which they construct. Then eat from all the fruits and follow the ways of your Lord laid down [for you].' There emerges from their bellies a drink, varying in colours, in which there is healing for people. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who give thought." (Qur'an 16: 68-69)

'We... made from water every living thing...Then will they not believe?' (Qur'an 21:30)



Islamic Arts

There is a common misconception about the importance of Arts in Islam. Indeed the predominant thought is that arts and beauty have no place in this way of life, yet just a few historical facts simply refute this.

Within a hundred years of the spread of Islam, art began to take importance within the Muslim world, including the forms of calligraphy, painting, ceramics, rugs and carpets, tiling, glass, metalwork, and the carving of rock and ivory. The beauti@ication of architecture was also key, and included the decoration of lamps and tiles, and grew in importance as the Muslim world grew.

Examples of how Islamic art spread and influenced others can be seen in the great mosques of the Ottoman region, and how they influenced the architecture of Rome. The trade of stained glass from Egypt to Vietnam in the 9th century is further testimony of the distinction of Islamic art. This section aims to give you a simple overview of some of the very basic aspects of art in Islam, in an attempt to impart just a nuance of its significance to the Islamic way of life.

Calligraphy

Because of the Muslim's profound respect and love for the Qur'an, the art of calligraphy was developed early on and reached a very high degree.

Throughout the Muslim world, Qur'anic verses beautify mosques, palaces, homes, businesses, and public areas. Often calligraphy is done in conjunction with decorative motifs, lovingly embellishing what is most sacred and precious.

Over the centuries, many scripts have evolved in various regions of the Muslim world. The main Arabic calligraphy styles are described briefly below.

KUFIC

Kufic is more or less a square and angular script, characterised by its heavy, bold, and lapidary style. Its letters are generally thick and it is suitable for writing on stone or metal, for painting or engraving inscriptions on the walls of mosques, and for the lettering on coins.

NASKH

Naskh is perhaps the most popular script in the Arab world. It is a cursive script based on certain laws governing the proportions between the letters. Naskh is legible and clear and was adapted as the preferred style for typesetting and printing. It evolved into innumerable styles and varieties, including the ta'liq, the riqa', and the diwani, and became the parent of the modern Arabic script.



Over the centuries, many scripts have evolved in various regions of the Muslim world.

THULUTH

This is the most important of all the ornamental scripts and is considered the king of styles. It is usually used to write headings, religious inscriptions, and princely titles and epigraphs.

TA'LIQ

Designed specifically to meet the needs of the Persian language and is still used widely in Iran, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent, Ta'liq is a fluid and elegant script.

DIWANI

Excessively cursive and highly structured with its letters unconventionally joined together with no vowel marks. It was developed during the reign of the early Ottoman Turks (16th - early 17th century).

There are other less common types of calligraphy, but by no means less beautiful. Examples being *Riq'a*, *Muhaqqaq*, *Rayhani*, *Ijaza* and Moroccan.



Fine Art

"God is Beautiful and Loves Beauty"; so said prophet Muhammad some 1400 years ago. He also said, *"God likes that when you do anything, you do it excellently." (Reported by Muslim)*

Such prophetic sayings provided the impetus for the Muslim's beautification and adornment of their places of worship, homes, and even of articles in common use in everyday life. Islamic architecture and decorative arts are still very much alive and valued in many parts of the Muslim world.

Islamic art developed a unique character, utilising a number of primary forms: geometric, arabesque, floral, and calligraphic, which are often interwoven. From early times, Muslim art has reflected a balanced, harmonious world-view.

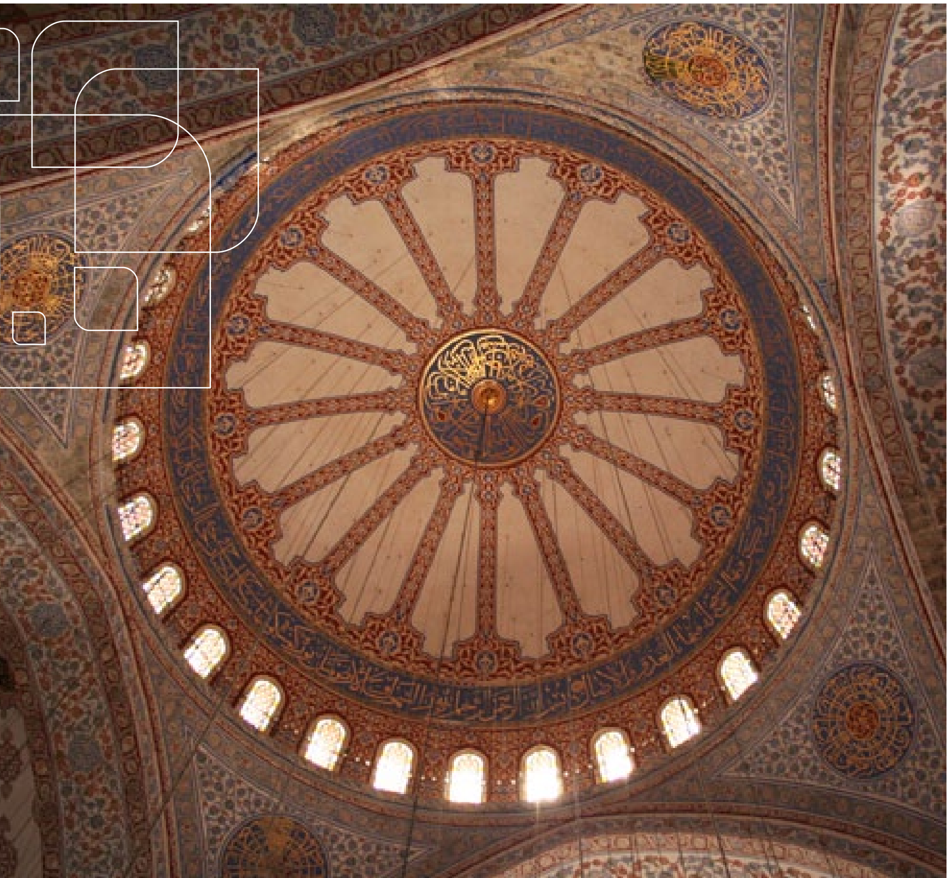
Muslims are convinced of the balance and harmony of all things in existence. Nothing occurs randomly or by chance, for all is part of the plan of the All-Wise, Most Merciful Planner. Some essentials of Islamic art are:

- Islamic art seeks to portray the meaning and essence of things, rather than just their physical form.
- Crafts and decorative arts are elevated to the status of art.
- Calligraphy is a major form of art in Islam.
- Intricate geometrical and floral patterns play an enormous role in Islamic art.
- Islamic art involves all types of art, not just explicitly religious art.

Islamic art developed a unique character, utilising a number of primary forms...

The Islamic Architecture

The architecture of the Islamic world throughout history was strengthened by its spiritual foundation, the Qur'an.



Urban areas in Islamic cities evolved over long periods of time with generations of craftsmen whose experience added variety to the environment.

The traditional city linked the architecture of Islamic schools, the market place, the palace and the home together with the mosque at the centre, to create beauty throughout our towns.

The mosques and palaces became, with leaps in architecture, more elaborate in decoration and design. The development of the dome allowed a large open prayer area and the calligraphic inscriptions glorified Allah.

One common theme is the general absence of human and animal form in architecture.

One common theme is the general absence of human and animal form in architecture. You will find that beautification instead centres on the words, text and script, praising Allah through the use of calligraphy.

A typical Islamic house would have certain features such as hidden courtyards to protect the family life from people outside and the harsh environment. The outside of the house is often very plain with the decorative concentration on the inside of the house. Over time, the house would be extended to accommodate the needs of a growing family – often with separate houses being built within one compound for the extended family.

Islamic Stained Glass



The earliest reported Islamic use of stained glass for the beautification of buildings was in the 7th century in Egypt. Further, modern archaeological discoveries have linked the trade of stained glass from Egypt to Vietnam in the 9th century.

By contrast, in Europe the art of stained glass reached its height between 1150 and 1500, when magnificent windows were created for great cathedrals.

Some of the influences of the stained glass design centred around geometric shape, calligraphy and the Islamic floral theme as found richly in the Ottoman area. Any artist aspires to the classical principles of harmony, unity and beauty by shaping and modifying the glass surface, painting with light to reveal multiple depths of pattern and decoration.

Some of the influences of the stained glass design centred around geometric shape…

Examples of this can be seen in the large and the small, from the beautification of grand mosques such as those created by the Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan, in different parts of the Muslim world, to the street lamps that illuminated the Muslim towns many hundreds of years ago.

Arabesque

Arabesque is generally an elaborative application of repeating geometric shapes that often echoes the form of plants and animals.

Arabesques are an element of Islamic art usually found decorating the windows and entrances of mosques, homes, souqs and inns. The choice of geometric forms which are to be used and how they are to be formatted, is based upon the Muslim artist's creativity and view of the world. Arabesque art is occasionally accompanied by calligraphy.

Arabesque Art often uses repeating geometric forms which have many hidden meanings behind them. One such example is that of the simple square, with its four equilateral sides, where the artist is trying to symbolise the equally important elements of nature; earth, air, fire and water. Circular shapes however, illustrate the never-ending oneness of the Creator.

Islam & Civilisation

You would be surprised to learn that the Islamic Empire took less than 100 years to build, essentially the shortest such emergence in recorded history. After the establishment, the progress within the civilisation was astounding. It continued to lead the world of science for nearly 1000 years.

We need to ask questions of what the main inspiring force behing the lightening speed of the rise of the Islamic civilisation was, and why it continued to grow and expand for at least five centuries.

Before Islam, the Arabian Peninsula was not at the forte of development, rather it was steeped in tradition. After the revelation of the Qur'an, we found the message of Islam constantly urging humankind to think, learn, observe, and explore the bounties created by God for human use in their role as trustees on earth.

"Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only they will remember (who are) people of understanding." [Qur'an 39:9]

For several centuries, the language of the Qur'an (Arabic) was the international vehicle for scientific research and advancement as English is today. Europeans who wanted to study physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy or medicine had to flock to Muslim universities, especially in Muslim Spain.

This enthusiasm for learning could only be matched by the attitude of tolerance that recognised and encouraged scholars regardless of their religion.

613 Hijra of Prophet Mohammad

600 CE · 700 · 800 · 900 · 1000 · 1100 · 1200 · 1300 · 1400 · 1500

The first hospital was built in Damascus in 707

Al-Fazari builds the astrolabe; the most important astronomical calculating device before the invention of digial computers

Mohammad Bin Musa Al-Khawaizmi develops Algebra and gives his name to algorithms

Al-Battani is the first to use the expressions "sine" and "cosine"

The Caliph Al-Ma'moon estimates the earth's circumference to be 24,000 miles; a very close figure to the one arrived at by the most modern means today

Muslim Chemist Jabir ibn Hayyan discovers Nitric Acid and describes the operation of evaporation, filtration, sublimination, melting, distillation, calcination and crystallisation

Ar-Razi (Rhases) presents the first ever clinical report on smallpox that includes a method for vaccination

Ar-Razi determines that the stars were moving varied in distance from earth

869 physicians applied for licensing examination in Baghdad

Muslim astronomers arrive at the figure of 33 20° for the latitude of Baghdad - a margin of error of only 10°

Abul-Wafa discovers the 3rd lunar inequality, the same discovery that was attributed nearly 1000 years later to the Danish Astronomer, Tycho-Braho

Az-Zahrawi (abulcasis) was a Muslim surgeon who introduced over 200 surgical instruments, some of which are prototypes of ones used today. Also his practice of using ink to mark incisions is still a standard operating procedure in the present day

Ibn Yunus Al-Masri discovers the pendulum and documents its oscillatory motion

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) writes Canon of Medicine (14 volumes). This is considered the most famous book in the history of medicine and for over 700 years was a standard medical reference in Europe

Mohammad Bin Ahmed revolutionises mathematics by inventing the concept of zero (Sifer in Arabic, from which the term Cipher and decipher were derived). It was not until 300 years later that Europe began to understand this concept

Operations to remove cataract were first performed in Iraq

Al-Bruni proposes that the Earth rotates around its own axis, calculates the Earth's circumference, and fixes scientifically the direction of Mecca from any point of the globe

Al-Biruni was among those who laid the foundation for modern trigonometry

Al-Jazari invents the crank-shaft which translates rotary motion into linear motion and is central to much of the machinery in the modern world, not least the internal combustion engine

Ibnun-Nafees explains the circulatory system 300 years before the birth of Sir William Harvey, to whom this discovery is credited

Abul-Hassan Al-Marakishi lists the coordinates of 130 places

Piri Re'is the Ottoman, createst the famous 'Map of America' which clearly shows Anrarctica, as well as the Andes Mountains of South America

MEDICINE

Muslim interest in health care is related to Islamic teachings. It is reported that Prophet Mohammad said: *"All worshippers of Allah, seek medication for Allah did not create a disease without creating a cure for it." [Reported by Abu Dawood]*
Muslim physicians made outstanding contributions in the field of medicine. The first hospital was built in Damascus in 707CE, and soon most major Islamic cities had hospitals which pioneered the practices of diagnosis, cure, and prevetion.

MATHEMATICS

Muslim mathematicians made significant advances in maths. They introduced the zero, Algebra and Algorithms to the world. They were also the first to use the sine and co-sine. Trigonometry is developed as a distinct branch of mathematics. They also had a major influence on the development of non-Euclidean Geometry. Their achievements opened the door to higher mathematics.

ASTRONOMY

"And it is He who placed for you the stars that you may be guided by them through the darknesses of the land and sea. We have detailed the signs for a people who know." [Qur'an 6:97]
Among Muslim achievements is the discovery of the sun's apogee (the points farthest from the Earth in the orbit of the sun). They drew a catalogue of maps of visible stars giving them Arabic names, corrected the sun and moon tables and fixed the length of the year.

CHEMISTRY

Muslim scholars refuted alchemy and established the basis of modern chemistry. Many of the discoveries made by the Muslim chemists have become part of our modern chemical world. In fact, many English terms in chemistry originated from Arabic, terms such as; camphor, alcohol, elixir, alkali and syrup.

GEOMETRY

While Europe believed that the earth was flat, Muslims were using globes to study geography. Writing in the 12th century, the Muslim geographer, Al-Idrisi said: "The Earth is round like a sphere and water adheres to it through a natural equilibrium which suffers no variations." Islamic interest in geography sparks from the duty of sharing the message of Islam with the world.

ENGINEERING

Valuable contributions to the field of engineering have been made by Muslim engineers. Al-Jazari wrote a book describing fifty mechanical devices in six different categories. Another great work is "The Book of Ingenious Devices" written by Banu Musa. In it, they describe a total of 100 devices and how to use them. Some of the inventions included are: the valve, float valve, feedback controller, a programmable machine, trick devices, and self-trimming lamps.

TRADE, MONEY & COINS

Trade played a huge role in The Muslim world. Some historians report that up to 850 Muslim ships were docked in the port of Canton (China) at one time. Islamic coins were found as far off as Scandinavia. A golden Anglo-Saxon coin carried the name of King Offa Rex of Mercia on one side; the Muslim declaration of faith on the other. The modern cheque comes from the Arabic saqq, a written vow to pay for goods upon delivery to avoid transporting money across dangerous lands.



The Environment

In Islam the relationship between humankind and the environment is based on the fact that everything on Earth worships Allah.

This worship is not merely ritual practice, but translated into actions; which means it is part of the belief of the Muslim to not damage the environment. Moreover, humans are responsible for the welfare and sustenance of the other inhabitants of this global environment, as the animal and plant kingdoms can not damage or destroy their environments.



Preserving Trees

Prophet Muhammad encouraged farming to increase agricultural resources and enhance a benevolent environment.

He said: *"Whenever a Muslim plants or grows a sapling or a plant, and a human being, a beast, or anything else feeds upon it, it is counted for him as an act of benevolence."* (Bukhari)

Prophet Muhammad was the first to establish environmental reservations, where trees could not be cut down and animals could not be killed.

Prophet Muhammad was the first to establish environmental reservations, where trees could not be cut down and animals could not be killed. He protected the whole of Madinah where no tree could be uprooted and nothing bigger than what can be used to drive a camel could be cut. He said: *"It is sacred, and none of its trees may be cut, except for a man feeding his camel."* (Bukhari)

He also said: *"I forbid the trees between the two lavas of Madinah to be cut down."* (Bukhari)

Water

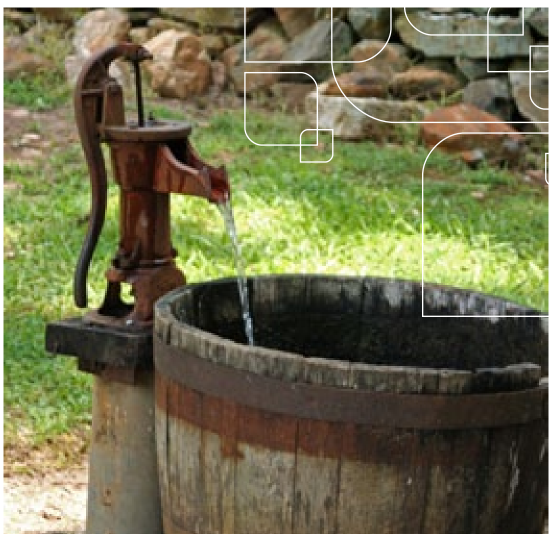
The prohibition on polluting water sources, roads and other areas of the common environment are some of the Islamic directives that aim to keep the environment healthy and pollution free.

Islam makes the protection of the environment and censure of its corruption a duty of every citizen in a righteous society.

"Why were there not among the generations before you some upright men preaching against corruption on earth?" (Qur'an 11: 116)

"Let no one urinate in stagnant water." (Bukhari)

"Avoid the three actions that bring people's curses, defecating in water sources, on roads, and in the shade." (Abu Dawood)





Caring for Animals

Imam Ibn Hazm says in his book Al-Muhalla: *"Charity to animals is benevolence and piety, and when a man does not help with animal welfare, he is promoting sin and aggression and disobeying God the Almighty."*

To keep an animal far from food and water, and to neglect the irrigation of fruit trees and plants until they perish is, according to God's own words, corruption on earth and destruction of plants and progeny.

"A prostitute was forgiven by God because, passing by a panting dog near a well and seeing that the dog was about to die of thirst, she took off her shoe, and tying it with her head-cover she drew out some water for it. So, God forgave her because of that good deed." (Bukhari)

The prophet cursed one who kills a living creature as a mere sport [as in hunting]. (Muslim)

The prophet prohibited the setting of animals so as to fight one another as a sport. (At-Tirmidhi)



Keeping Cities Clean

Prophet Muhammad used to urge people to clean and not pollute their towns. He said:

"I have been shown the deeds of my followers: both good and bad ones. I found among their good deeds the removal of harmful objects from people's way." (Muslim)

He also said: *"Faith includes over seventy branches, ...the simplest of which is the removal of any source of harm from the road." (Muslim)*

Community

Prophet Muhammad forbade causing harm to individuals and to the community, as he said:

"There shall be no infliction of harm on oneself or others." (Ibn Majah)

He also forbade any injury to one's neighbour, any neighbour, whether in residence, public transport, public places, or offices. He said: *"Whoever believes in God and the Day of Judgement should not hurt his neighbour." (Bukhari)*



Islam & Human Rights

Before Islam, those who had power and authority would abuse the rights of those less fortunate; women were owned as possessions, children were murdered at birth, and those without protection were treated as slaves.

Islam has a very comprehensive code on human rights and the treatment of human beings from sections of the community that can be vulnerable. Islam came and outlawed many of these abhorrent practices, and restored dignity to the most oppressed.

Islam legislated the rights of humans upon one another, and reinforced the equivalence of all, reminding humanity of the equality between men and women, Arab and non-Arab, regardless of colour; superiority in Islam is based upon piety and love of Allah.

Women in Islam

Islam was revealed at a time when many people throughout the world denied the humanity of women. Whether seen as sub-human or not, women were still considered a thing created for the humble service of men.



Islam returned the rights to women that had been eroded away by a decadent society. The woman's dignity and humanity were restored, making her status equal to that of man. Female infanticide was outlawed and rights were given to women in regards to inheritance which did not exist previously. Among other things, women now had the right to have personal possessions and therefore have their own money and wealth (with no obligation to spend upon their families), the right to agree to marriage (her consent is obligatory), and then keep her maiden name after marriage. They now had the right to divorce, to education, to vote; the rights are many and put women not only on an equal pedestal, but elevated their status above that of men in many circumstances:

Abu Hurairah related that a man came to the prophet Muhammad and asked, "O messenger of Allah, which person of all the people is best entitled to kind treatment and good companionship from me?" He answered, "Your mother." The man asked, "And then?" He said, "Your mother." "And after her?" He said, "Your mother." "And after her?" The prophet said, "Your father." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Many rights were only furnished to women recently in the West; a clear example of this is where the right to own property, the right to execute her own will and the right to divorce only came into law in the 19th century. Further, due to cultural misguidance seen in some societies outside of the Muslim world, the birth of a daughter is still viewed as a burden. Female infanticide is still common through abortion, and leaves a large disparity between the numbers of men and women within those communities.

Female infanticide was outlawed and rights were given to women in regards to inheritance which did not exist previously.

The Islamic view on the status of women can be summarised in the following verse of the Qur'an:

"Their Lord responded to them: 'I never fail to reward any worker among you for any work you do, be you male or female, you are equal to one another…' " (Qur'an 3: 195)

The Rights of Children in Islam

In much of the world before Islam, there was a great deal of mistreatment of children, the worst of which was infanticide; the killing of children soon after birth.

This was practised for fear of destitution, as sacrifices to false gods, or for preventing social disgrace with the birth of a daughter.

The Qur'an rejected all inhumane treatment and gave children many rights; the rights to be fed, clothed and protected, the right to enjoy love and affection from their parents, the right to equal treatment between the siblings, the right to education and the right to adequate inheritance.

"Say, 'Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. [He commands] that you not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them...' " (Qur'an 6: 151)

Furthermore, the mind of the child must be nurtured, and education is vital in this respect. The heart of a child must be filled with faith, the child's mind entertained with proper guidance, knowledge and wisdom, and morals and good character are integral to the child's development.

"Fear Allah and treat your children [small or grown] fairly [with equal justice]." (Bukhari and Muslim)

The Qur'an rejected all inhumane treatment and gave children many rights...



Human Rights in Islam and Ethnic Minorities



Islam gave to mankind an ideal code of human rights 14 centuries ago. These rights aim to confer honour and dignity upon mankind and eliminate exploitation, oppression and injustice.

These were summarised in the Final Sermon of prophet Muhammad, considered the first human rights declaration. These rights exist for all communities, whether Muslim or not, the male and the female, those living in peace or in war; their rights are guaranteed by Allah.

"..All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action..." (Excerpt from the Final Sermon).

Human rights in Islam are firmly rooted in the belief that Allah, and Allah alone, is the Law Giver and the source of all human rights. Due to their divine origin, no ruler, government, assembly or authority can curtail or violate in any way the human rights conferred by Allah, nor can they be surrendered. These rights are also evident when it comes to non-Muslims living in Muslim society. The prophet Muhammad used to visit the sick people in Madinah, Jews as well as Muslims. Hospitals admitted and treated people irrelevant of their religion or social status. At the governmental level, Christians and Jews reached prominent positions of authority. When a Jewish funeral procession passed by the Prophet, he stood up as a sign of respect. Christians and Jews were admitted to Muslim schools, colleges and universities and some were given boarding at the expense of the State. During the Spanish Inquisition the Muslim World was a safe haven for the Jews, who like the Muslims were fleeing Spanish persecution, after prospering and living in harmony in Muslim Spain for over 700 years.

"Whoever kills an innocent soul, who has not taken a life or brought destruction to society, it is as if he has killed the entire humanity; and whoever saves an innocent soul it is as if he has saved the entire humanity." (Qur'an 5: 32)

Human rights in Islam are firmly rooted in the belief that Allah, and Allah alone is the Law Giver...



The Last Sermon of the prophet Mohammed

Saturday, March the 7th, 632CE

The first human rights declaration in the world, before the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights and the UN human rights codes.

"...O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds. Allah has forbidden you to take interest, therefore all interest obligation shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer any inequity. Allah has judged that there shall be no interest…

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not allow anyone to enter your house whom you do not approve of, as well as never to be unchaste...

All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab, also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves…

O People, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O people, and understand words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and my example, the Sunnah, and if you follow these you will never go astray…

All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again, and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed Your message to Your people."

The Covenant of Omar



When Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (the second Caliph) entered Jerusalem at the head of a Muslim army in 638CE, he entered the city on foot, as a gesture of humility.

There was no bloodshed. On the contrary, those who wanted to leave were allowed to do so with all their possessions and were guaranteed a safe passage. Those who wanted to stay were granted protection for their lives, their property, and their places of worship. Umar declined the offer made by Patriarch Sophronius, chief magistrate of the surrendered city, to pray one of the five daily prayers in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, lest in years to come, Muslims might try to turn it into a mosque in his memory.

"In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. This is an assurance of peace and protection given by the servant of Allah, Umar, Commander of the Believers to the people of Ilia' (Jerusalem)..."

He gave them an assurance of protection for their lives, property, churches and crosses as well as the sick and healthy and all its religious community.

"...their churches shall not be occupied, demolished nor taken away wholly or in part. None of their crosses nor property shall be seized. They shall not be coerced in their religion nor shall any of them be injured. The people of Ilia shall pay Jizyah (head tax on non-Muslims living under the protection of Muslim rule; paid for utilising the benefits of citizenship and as exemption from military service) as inhabitants of cities do...

Whoever wants to leave shall be guaranteed safety for his life and property until he reaches his safe haven. Whoever stays shall also be safe, in which case he shall pay as much tax as the people of Ilia' do. Should any of the people of Ilia wish to move together with their property along with the Romans and to clear out of their churches and crosses, they shall be guaranteed safety for their lives, churches and crosses, until they have reached their safe haven. He whoever wishes to move along with the Roman, may do so, and whoever wishes to return back home to his kinsfolk, may do so. Nothing shall be taken from them until their crops have been harvested. To the contents of this covenant here are given the Covenant of Allah, the guarantees of His messenger, the Caliphs and the Believers, provided the people of Ilia' pay their due Gaza..."

He whoever gets out shall be guaranteed safety for his life and property until he reaches his safe haven.

Witnesses to the covenant were: Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed, Abdur-Rahman Ibn Auf, Amr Ibn Al-`Aas and Mu'awiya Ibn Abi-Sufian. Made and executed in the year 15 AH.

The existence of life is a marvel. Everything that we see, feel and touch is in perfect harmony within a grand scheme of things from galaxies and stars to subatomic particles. Islam offers a unique insight and a clear perspective of things we know and so much that we do not know. Though Islam has been a victim of countless propaganda and media attacks, it remains the fastest growing religion in the world. For curious minds, this fact alone is enough to investigate Islam. And upon a closer look, one finds clarity of message and simplicity that explains Islam's universal acceptance and rapid growth.

Understanding Islam is an attempt to present the belief and practices of the 1.8 billion Muslims around the globe. This knowledge, i.e. Islam was revealed to mankind 1400 years ago and has been passed on unaltered from generation to generation ever since, in a book known as '*Qur'an*'.

If *you too* are curious about Islam; there is no better time to learn about it than now. So get a cup of coffee, relax and start your journey to understanding the faith that has stood the test of time.